

Sunday School

THE APOSTLES IMPRISONED.

Act 5: 17-32.

February 14, 1909.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
—Matt. 5: 10.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q 42. What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?

A. The sum of the Ten Commandments is, to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

M—Acts 5: 17-28.

S.—1 Peter 4: 12-19.

W.—Jer. 26: 8-16.

T—Acts 5: 29-42.

F.—1 Peter 3: 8-18.

T.—Matt. 10: 16-22.

S.—Matt. 5: 1-16.

TOPICAL OUTLINE.

The Second Persecution—

The apostles imprisoned, but miraculously delivered, vs. 17-25.

Again arrested and tried before the council, vs. 26-32.

Released by Gamaliel's advice, but cruelly beaten, v. 32-42.

LESSON COMMENTS.

When Jesus of Nazareth was in the neighborhood of Mount Hermon he said to his disciples, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." To be a followers of Jesus one must bear the cross. To be a Christian is to be in fellowship with Jesus and this fellowship implies a share in his crown and glory by and by and also a share with him in service and suffering here on earth. In this lesson we find the Apostles standing in their lot as partners with Jesus in suffering.

After the death of Ananias the Apostles became more prominent than ever, and daily they assembled in Solomon's porch. To one and all they declared the story of a risen Jesus and God bore them witness with signs and wonders and divers miracles. Many became believers in Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost was present with great power and from the nooks and corners of the city and from neighboring towns and villages they brought the sick and afflicted on beds and couches and the shadow of Peter falling on them as he passed would relieve them of their maladies.

It was the natural thing for the Sadducees to rise in open conflict with the Apostles. Hitherto they had been the teachers of the people. To them the young men of the nation had bowed with reverence. But rapidly their influence was waning. They would soon cease to be the leaders. Something must be done. Then the high priest rose up and all that were with him, filled with indignation (jealousy) and laid hands on the Apostles. Jealousy is cruel as the grave. It is the pain one feels when what belongs to him passes over to a rival. The honor and glory and prestige of social rank and position which these men claimed and received were passing to others, and their souls were in bitterness. Jesus Christ had foretold to his servants that bonds and imprisonments awaited them. He had himself partaken of bitter waters and the servants were now walking in the footsteps of the Master.

Old Mr. Hold-the-World was willing enough to follow the king when he walked in sunshiny weather and appeared to his people in silver slippers. But the true Christian must follow Jesus in all sorts of weather. When and where he leads Peter must follow. The way to the mountain top may lead

over sharp stones. That road I must travel even though on bleeding feet.

Following Jesus the disciples were shut up in the common prison, but bars and bolts did not rob them of peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost; and they could each one sing David's song, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God!" and lo, in a little while the darkness gives way and the light appears. The angel of the Lord came nigh. The doors were opened and through the armed guards these men of God, prisoners of hope, came forth. At the break of day they are found in the temple telling men the words of this life.

Somewhere in the city the rulers were taking counsel against the Lord and against his anointed saying in the spirit of heathen men, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh and the Lord shall have them in derision. The truth of God cannot be arrested by puny men and when Annas and the leaders called for their prisoners the messenger comes with the startling news of the empty prison and another one brings tidings of the preachers in the temple.

There are many pictures of God's people standing before kings. Elijah stands before Ahab, David and his friends before the kings of Babylon, Paul before Nero and later on Luther before the German princes. None, however, make a deeper impression than this one of Peter and his brethren before the angry Jews. Before the bar of justice the real criminal feels abashed. His conscience disturbs him and he is ill at ease. His thoughts trouble him and his face is pallid.

But when the apostles stood before the Jews that day the courage of God was in their hearts. They knew the strength of their cause. Men might kill them but they could never crush them. Clad in the armor of Jesus Christ and full of the Holy Ghost they cry aloud, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slow and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." This verse (31) is one of the bulwarks of Westminster Calvinism. It teaches that repentance is the gift of God. The change of a man's mind from enmity to love is the work of God. Many think that this grace can be spun out of the human will, but the remission of sins and repentance from sin are both alike from God. This doctrine is exasperating to the carnal mind and we see these Sadducees cut to the heart and angry enough to kill.

Through God's providence the words of Gamaliel divert them from their purpose. "If this work be of men it will fail. If it be from God you cannot arrest it, so let these men alone."

In the view of the ages the doctrine of Gamaliel will be worked out in history and found true. Baalism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Mormonism and many other systems are all of human origin. They are certain to come to naught. We need not disturb ourselves about them. They are born of Satan and are bound to fail. Our duty is to bear testimony against false doctrine and proclaim the truth and when we have done that our duty is ended. Falsehood in doctrine will surely come to naught.

The gospel which prevailed that day over these proud rulers marches in triumph through the ages. As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven and watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, so shall be the word of God. It shall not return void.

The preaching of Gamaliel is another instance of a proud moralist being used for God's glory. The rulers of the Jews adopted his counsel. It is hard to see how they could reject it. Whether they believed it or not, it gave them a good chance to close the trial.